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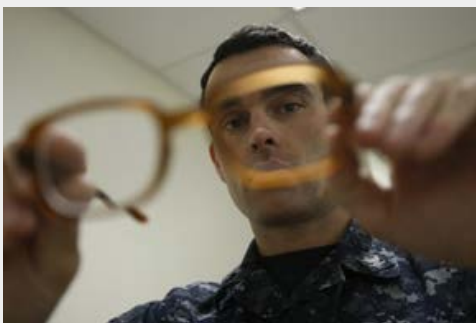
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Seeing Parris Island for the First Time

Filed underUNCATEGORIZED

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By Petty Officer 3rd Class Jeremy Jones, Branch Health Clinic (BHC) Parris Island, S.C.



Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class Jeremy Jones inspects a pair of sturdy brown plastic S-9 frames as he prepares to make eyewear for dozens of new recruits at Branch Health Clinic MCRD Parris Island, S.C. (Photo by Lance Cpl. Michael Rogers)

The moment a recruit steps off the bus at Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD) Parris Island, S.C., the first thing they see is a U.S. Marine Corps drill instructor “welcoming” them to the island as they begin their transformation from civilian to United States Marine. At some point within the next 48 hours, that recruit, along with several hundred of his or her new shipmates, arrives at Branch Health Clinic (BHC) Parris Island so staff can ensure they are medically ready for the next 13 weeks of training.

They will make stops at dental, recruit medical readiness (RMR), optometry, and audiology over the next three days.

Each day is a non-stop evolution that begins at 6 a.m. and doesn’t end until the last recruit has been checked out. The recruits are split up into platoons consisting of 35-100 recruits per platoon. Each department, including optometry where I work, has a two-hour time slot to screen the recruits. My part of the evolution is checking their eyes and making their glasses (the beloved eyewear known more for their sturdiness than stylishness).

Three days a week, before sunrise, my department, which has two optometrists and up to five corpsmen, prepares for the hustle and bustle of daily recruit processing. I start off by prepping the lens fabricating machines, entering each and every recruit into the military Composite Health Care System (CHCS) via a roster given to us by the Marine recruit processing section.

By dawn, platoons of recruits are marched into the clinic to begin medical processing as they get to know Navy Medicine for the first time. I work with my fellow corpsmen to identify which platoon optometry will receive first and then we split them up into four groups: recruits who wear contacts, recruits who wear glasses, recruits who do not know if they need glasses, and recruits who think they can see perfectly. Then, the testing begins.

Recruits with contacts take them out before testing because they are not allowed to wear contacts during training. The recruits with glasses will have their prescriptions pulled from their civilian lenses. The recruits who are not sure if they can see or who think they can see

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perfectly are given a visual acuity test. The outcome of the testing will determine which recruits need glasses, need to see the optometrist, or is one of the “unlucky” ones who do not get a nice new pair of standard issue glasses. As you can imagine, these young recruits are very nervous and have been awake for hours. Mindful that we’re the first experience with Navy Medicine for most of them, we do our best to set them at ease as we make sure that every recruit is tested thoroughly.

Some recruits will need a comprehensive exam by the optometrist who typically sees anywhere from five to 40 recruits a day. During the exam, a wide array of potentially disqualifying eye diseases and disorders, such as keratoconus and glaucoma, are diagnosed. The recruits who need glasses but not a comprehensive exam are properly screened by me and my fellow corpsmen. We normally see anywhere from 40 to 200 recruits a day and ensure that 100 percent of the recruits processed at BHC Parris Island have their vision tested.

While the exams are taking place, we start fabricating the new glasses. We make about 40 to 140 glasses per day. Recruits leave medical with their marvelous new brown plastic S-9 frame eyewear that very same day. From our viewpoint, the new recruits are ready to start their training.

My opinion may be biased, but BHC Parris Island is the finest clinic in the Navy. Here, recruits get their first glimpse into Navy Medicine and their experience here will help them understand what it means to be under the care of the finest doctors, nurses, corpsmen, administrators, and civilians in the world. I am humbled being part of such a great team.

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